

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 2095

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SUBJECT: EDITORIAL REACTION TO LINKAGE OF PANAMA CANAL TREATY
TO VIETNAM SITUATION

SUMMARY. THE GOP-CONTROLLED PRESS HAS RESPONDED SHARPLY TO APRIL 9
AP ARTICLE WHICH QUOTED HIGH PENTAGON OFFICIAL AS SAYING U.S. FOREIGN
POLICY REVERSES WERE CREATING SITUATION IN WHICH U.S. PUBLIC OPINION
WOULD NOT TOLERATE THE YIELDING OF THE CANAL ZONE TO PANAMA. EDITO-
RIALS IN APR 10 EDITIONS OF EL PANAMA AMERICA AND MATUTINO HAVE ASSER-

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TED THAT PANAMA AND LATIN AMERICA WOULD NOT ACCEPT POSTPONEMENT OF
CANAL SETTLEMENT BECAUSE OF U.S. PROBLEMS ELSEWHERE AND REJECTED THE
AP ARTICLE'S CONTENTION THAT TORRIJOS' POLITICAL SURVIVAL IS LINKED T
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EARLY SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS. PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS, IT WAS STRESSED,
HAVE TOLD THE PEOPLE THAT THE TREATY PROCESS COULD TAKE 10 WEEKS,
10 MONTHS OR 10 YEARS; THE IMPORTANT THING WAS NOT SPEED BUT THAT
PANAMA'S GOALS WERE ACHIEVED. THESE EDITORIALS, AND OTHER RECENT
MEDIA COMMENTARY, INDICATE THAT THE GOP IS BEGINNING TO PREPARE
PEOPLE FOR THE POSSIBILITY THAT A TREATY MAY BE DELAYED IN THE
SENATE. END SUMMARY.

1. SPECULATION THAT THE U.S., BECAUSE OF ITS LOSSES IN VIETNAM AND
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REVERSES ELSEWHERE, MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO DELIVER ON ITS PROMISES

OF AGREEMENT ON A NEW CANAL TREATY, HAS PROMPTED SHARP EDITORIAL REACTION. EDITORIAL RESPONSE WAS TRIGGERED BY AN APRIL 9 FEATURE ARTICLE, CARRIED IN LA ESTRELLA AND STAR & HERALD, BY AP'S GEORGE GEDDA ENTITLED "VIETNAM LOSS COULD DELAY PANAMA CANAL TREATY." CITING A "HIGH PENTAGON OFFICIAL" AS SAYING "ONCE SOUTH VIETNAM FALLS, SHOCK WAVES WILL BE FELT ALL OVER THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THIS COUNTRY," GEDDA SAID THE OFFICIAL'S MESSAGE WAS THAT "PUBLIC OPINION WOULD NOT TOLERATE THE YIELDING OF THE CANAL ZONE TO PANAMA." GEDDA ALSO CITED SOURCES CLOSE TO SECRETARY KISSINGER AS SAYING THE SECRETARY HAD BEEN URGING A MORE "ABRASIVE" FOREIGN POLICY IN THE FACE OF THE DEFEATS SUFFERED. THE ARTICLE SPECULATED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION MAY DECIDE NOT TO SEEK SENATE RATIFICATION UNTIL AFTER THE 1976 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THIS TACTIC, CONCLUDED GEDDA, WOULD PLACE INTOLERABLE POLITICAL PRESSURES ON TORRIJOS "WHOSE SURVIVAL IS LARGE- Y
DEPENDENT UPON HIS ABILITY TO NEGOTIATE THE CANAL ZONE AWAY FROM THE UNITED STATES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE."

2. GEDDA'S ARTICLE DREW SHARP EDITORIAL RETORTS FROM GOP-CONTROLLED MATUTINO AND PANAMA-AMERICA APR 10. THE MATUTINO EDITORIAL ,
APPEARING ON PAGE ONE UNDER TITLE "MALICIOUS AND PROVOCATIVE SPECULATIONS", STRONGLY REFUTED MAIN POINTS OF THE GEDDA ARTICLE, ESPECIALLY THE LINKAGE OF TORRIJOS' SURVIVAL TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF A NEW TREATY. ITS MAIN POINTS WERE:

1. THE REVERSES THE UNITED STATES SUFFERED IN INDOCHINA, PORTUGAL AND OTHER PARTS OF THE THIRD WORLD WERE A REACTION PROVOKED BY IMPERIALIST POLICIES. THE MOST SENSIBLE RECOMMENDATION TO THE U.S. WOULD BE TO MAKE ITS FOREIGN POLICY MORE REALISTIC AND SEEK TO GAIN ALLIES AND NOT ANTAGONISTS. A HARD LINE BY U.S. POSITION WILL ONLY SHARPEN THE ANTAGONISMS.

B. THE SPECULATIONS AND MANEUVERS WHICH HAVE BEEN DEVELOPING AROUND THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS ARE NORMAL AND UNDERSTANDABLE WITH RELATION TO THE INTERNAL POLITICS OF THE U.S. BUT OTHER ASPECTS OF THE GEDDA REPORT MIGHT APPEAR TO BE SUBTLE BLACKMAIL WITH THE PURPOSE OF PRESSURING PANAMANIAN LEADERS FROM FORCEFULLY ASSERTING PANAMA'S POSITION.

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C. THE LINKAGE OF GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS' POLITICAL SURVIVAL TO "HIS ABILITY TO NEGOTIATE THE RECOVERY OF THE CANAL ZONE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE" WAS DESCRIBED AS "RECKLESS AND OFFENSIVE." THE EDITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE FIGHT FOR SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL PANAMA'S NATIONAL
TERRITORY IS A RELIGION THAT UNITES ALL PANAMANIANS. HOWEVER, THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF PANAMA DOES NOT DEPEND SOLELY UPON THE CANA

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THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION GAVE PRIORITY TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF PANAMA' INTERIOR. THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT HAS MADE CLEAR THAT THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS COULD LAST 10 WEEKS, 10 MONTHS 10 YEARS. THE IMPORTANT THING IS NOT THE TIME BUT THE PATRIOTIC OBJECTIVES WHICH ARE ACCOMPLISHED. THE REVOLUTION IS IRREVERSIBLE. NO ONE SHOULD FORGET THIS AND PROBE FUTILELY TO FIND SPOTS OF WEAKNESS AND PROVOKE REACTIONS WHICH BREAK THE DIKES OF PANAMANIAN PATIENCE. WE WILL NOT PLAY THIS GAME.

3. TAKING AN ALLEGORICUI APPROACH, THE EL PANAMA AMERICA'S APR 10 EDITORIAL COMPARED THE CONDITION OF "AMERICAN IMPERIALISM" TO THAT OF A WOUNDED ANIMAL, NEAR ITS END BUT STILL CAPABLE OF HARMING SMALL COUNTRIES SUCH AS PANAMA. OBSERVING THAT THE "INTERNATIONAL PRESS" HAS IMPLIED THAT THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS ARE ENMESHED IN U.S. STRATEGIC THINKING-TO THE POINT WHERE U.S. REVERSES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA CAN AFFECT THEM-THE EDITORIAL NOTED THAT THE U.S. HAS INCLUDED THE CANAL IN ITS STRATEGIC PLANS FOR DEFENSE OF ITS COASTS. STRESSING LATIN SUPPORT FOR PANAMA'S POSITION, EL PANAMA AMERICA ASSERTED THAT U.S. REVERSES, IN VIETNAM AND ELSEWHERE, WERE NOT PANAMA'S PROBLEM AND WARNED THAT NEITHER PANAMA NOR LATIN AMERICA WILL ACCEPT POSTPONEMENT OF THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS OR A PROMPT SETTLEMENT OF THE CANAL ISSUE BECAUSE OF U.S. "GEOPOLITICAL AND STRATEGIC MILITARY" CONSIDERATIONS. REAFFIRMING THAT RECOVERY OF PANAMANIAN JURISDICTION WAS PARAMOUNT OBJECTIVE, THE PAPER OBSERVED THAT THE CANAL WAS NB VITAL TO PANAMA'S ECONOMY. PANAMA COULD LIVE WITHOUT THE CANAL BUT WOULD NOT TAKE ONE STEP BACK FROM ITS STRUGGLE TO ELIMINATE THE CANAL ZONE. ADDRESSING THE QUESTION OF URGENCY, THE EDITORIAL MAINTAINED THAT IT WAS THE U.S. THAT WAS PRESSED. WITHOUT A NEW AGREEMENT, IT STATED, THE PRESENT CANAL CANNOT LEGALLY BE EXPANDED OR A SEA LEVEL CANAL CONSTRUCTED. THESE QUESTIONS WILL NOT BE DISCUSSED UNTIL THE ISSUE OF PANAMANIAN JURISDICTION IS RESOLVED.

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4. IN AN EARLIER COMMENTARY IN THESEUNDAY EDITION OF EL PANAMA AMERICA "DOMINICAL", JOAQUIN BELENO'S COLUMN, "VIETNAM, WATERGATE AND THE PANAMA CANAL," TOUCHED ON THE SAME THEMES AND REFERRED TO A TV COMMENTARY BY MARIO VELASQUEZ ON APR 4, THE THRUST OF WHICH WAS "THE BLAME FOR ANY INABILITY OF THE U.S. TO CARRY OUT ITS OBLIGATIONS SHOULD NOT BE CAST UPON TORRIJOS OR THE PANAMANIAN NEGOTIATORS." "NO PROMPT SOLUTIONS CAN BE EXPECTED," SAID BELENO, "FROM A COUNTRY THAT IS DIVIDED AND STILL SUFFERING FROM THE TRAUMA OF THE WATERGATE CASE."

5. COMMENT. SPECULATION THAT USG MIGHT ATTEMPT TO ORCHESTRATE POSTPONEMENT OF TREATY PROCESS FIRST SURFACED LOCALLY ON APR 13 IN CANAL ZONE DURING CODEL METCALFE VISIT WITH REVELATION OF "RUMOR" THAT

STATE DEPARTMENT PLANNED TO DELAY A DRAFT TREATY IN THE SENATE
UNTIL

1977. THE GEDDA ARTICLE PROPELLED SPECULATION TO FOREFRONT.
POSSIBILITY THAT, FOR WHATEVER REASON, DELAY MIGHT BE IN THE CARDS
HAS APPARENTLY BEEN TAKEN SERIOUSLY. WE DETECT IN COMMENTARY
BY MARPA VELASQUEZ AND THE FEATURE EDITORIALS IN GOP'S MATUTINO
AND PANAMA AMERICA THAT THE PANAMANIAN'S ARE BEGINNING TO PREPARE
FOR THE POSSIBILITY THAT A TREATY WILL RUN INTO DIFFICULTIES
AND PERHAPS DELAY IN THE U.S. SENATE. SIMILARLY, THEY ARE REACTING
VERY STRONGLY TO ANY SUGGESTION THAT A DELAY OR FAILURE TO AGREE ON
A TREATY WOULD AFFECT TORRIJOS' POLITICAL POWER. THE PANAMANIAN'S
ARE VERY CONSCIOUS THAT DURING THE PAST SEVEN YEARS THEIR GOVERNMENT
HAS DIRECTED ITS RESOURCES TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND TO THE
INTEGRATION INTO PANAMANIAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THE
PREVIOUSLY MARGINALIZED PEASANTS. THESE EFFORTS HAVE CREATED A
POLITICAL BASE FOR TORRIJOS EXTENDING BEYOND THE PANAMA CITY-COLON
AXIS. NEVERTHELESS, THE FAILURE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BRING
SERIOUS CRITICISM AND PRESSURES UPON TORRIJOS' GOVERNMENT AND IN
OUR VIEW FORCE HIM INTO AN ANTAGONISTIC POLICY TOWARD THE
U.S.

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